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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1677220> since 2018-09-25T10:14:12Z

Publisher:

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FROM THE HEART OF ANATOLIA TO MESOPOTAMIA

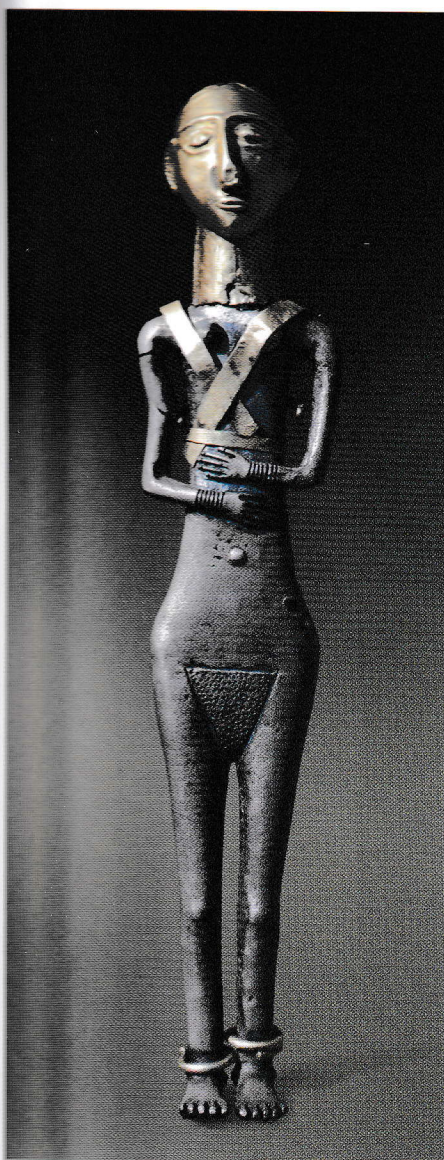
ANATOLIAN FEMALE IDOLS

Images of nude women are well documented among the artefacts found in many Anatolian Neolithic sites. The best known example is the statuette depicting a mature woman sitting naked on a leopard throne found at Catalhöyük. She was thought to represent either a goddess, the so-called "Mistress of Animals" (fig. 2, p. 33), or a member of the elite in Catalhöyük society; in fact, her corpulence is seen combined with an elaborate seat and hence would suggest that she held a high social position.

Female statuettes continued to be made in Anatolia during the fourth and third millennia BC. The so-called "Kilia statuettes" are made of marble, with large heads and flat bodies; a marked incision stresses the pubic triangle. Although the vast majority of the Kilia statuettes come from sites in the region of Western Anatolia, some exemplars were discovered also at Kirgêhir in Central Anatolia. However, these were not made locally, but presumably reached Kirgêhir as a consequence of the trade relations between Central Anatolian villages and other sites farther west.

Several anthropomorphic figures were brought to light at Alacahöyük in burials datable to the Early Bronze Age. They are reproductions of nude women made of clay or metal. Some of these images have naturalistic features, whereas others are simply schematic figures (fig. 5). A contemporary metal figure found at Hasanoglan comes complete with a golden mask and golden jewels (fig. 4). The naturalistic aspect of such images is also a characteristic of the metal statuette that represents a woman with a child at her breast, which was found at Horoztepe. These figures have a particular Anatolian character that distinguishes them from other, more abstract contemporary statuettes coming from Mesopotamian and Aegean sites. Alabaster figures datable to the Early Bronze Age come from the Anatolian site of Kültepe, and almost all the stone figures were discovered in a grave. Circular in shape, the figures echo the violin-shaped ones from Kilia, although there is no direct connection between the two groups of statuettes.

The Early Bronze Age metal and stone statuettes are usually associated with burials (like those found at Alacahöyük, Demircihüyük, Kültepe, etc.), whereas the clay figures mostly come from domestic contexts, such as houses and courtyards. The diffusion of idols made of stone or metal can be connected to the emergence of leading individuals, who controlled the circulation of these precious materials. Both



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Naked female with crossed arms
Anatolia: Hasanoğlu
Ca. 2500–2100 BC
Silver with gold ornaments
Anadolu Medeniyetler Müzesi, Ankara

the residential *megara* buildings at Kültepe and the élite burials, such as those found at Alacahöyük, support the assumption that even the metal figurines were prestigious display objects. The naturalistic aspect of some of these images, which distinguishes them from the more abstract clay figurines, could also be a distinctive trait of the objects belonging to members of the elite.

Statuettes were also found at Kültepe in the levels of the first centuries of the second millennium BC. They are made of ivory or metal and reproduce naked goddesses depicted with hands under their breasts. The figurines discovered in the phase Kültepe Ib, which corresponds to the Assyrian Colony period, show specific iconographic characters, which can also be found in the Hittite plastic artefacts, such as the round face, a big nose and an enigmatic smile.

THE INTENTIONAL BREAKAGE

Female figurines made of clay were unearthed in the excavations in the Anatolian third millennium site of Koçumbeli. The flat body shape of these figurines is similar to that of the Kilia violin statuettes; in fact, it is flat with a semi-circular lower body on which the neck and the head are placed. The other body parts are only abstractly represented, such as the arms, which are seen simply as short protrusions, and the breasts, which are depicted as holes.

An in-depth analysis of the Koçumbeli statuettes demonstrated that many of them had been broken intentionally at the neck. The deposition of broken heads of clay statuettes is also documented at the aforementioned Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük. Acts of intentional breakage were also noticed on some of the figurines found at the Syrian site of Tell Halawa, which can be dated to the late Early Bronze Age. Some of the broken heads seem to have been carefully buried.

The head breakage might be linked to magic rituals, such as the rites of passage, and could refer to events such as adolescence and marriage, when a young woman would *cut* her previous ties with her family and enter a new phase of life.

SYRO-MESOPOTAMIAN CONNECTIONS

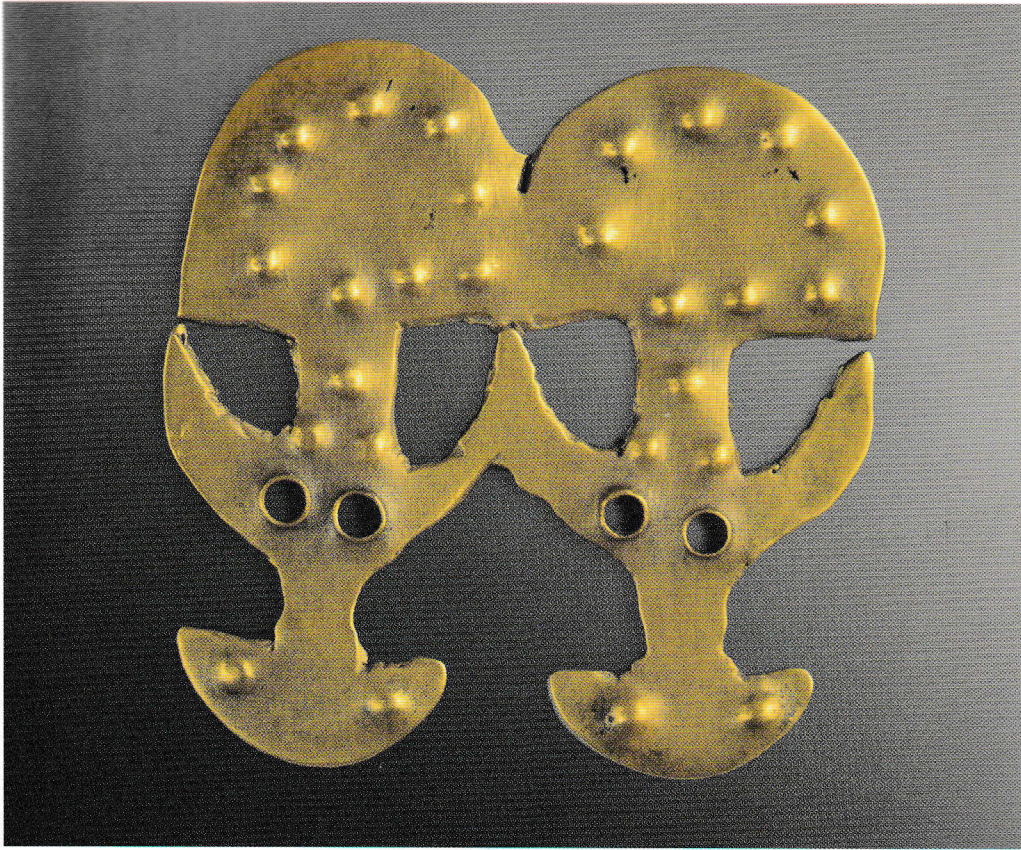
Tell Brak is one the most fascinating archaeological sites in Syria. It was excavated by Max Mallowan, a prominent archaeologist and the husband of Agatha Christie. Tell Brak was an important centre and hosted a huge temple, the so-called “Eye Temple”, under which two older sanctuaries were situated. The oldest one of these is known as the “Gray Temple” and can be dated to the Late Chalcolithic III. It is here that Mallowan unearthed a huge number of flat anthropomorphic figurines in limestone with geometric bodies and heads represented by two big eyes placed directly onto the neck. Sometimes a smaller figure was incised directly onto the front of the body. This iconography supported the assumption that the objects represented women and in the latter case a mother and child.

These figurines are generally interpreted as offerings to the deity venerated in the temple, whose precise identity remains unknown. The symbolism, which the

"eye idols" refer to, is difficult to ascertain, and we do not know whether they represented a specific goddess. In spite of this, the eye idols have attracted the attention of researchers for decades and also had a certain "hypnotic effect" over people who made of the eye idols a universal female symbol diffused all over the ancient world. Later, the interpretation of the eye idols as cult images was challenged by Catherine Breiquet (1996) and Annie Caubet (2006), who suggested that these objects might have had a practical function, used perhaps as textile tools, like those seen on some Uruk seals.

The site of Habuba Kabira in Western Syria was once a Uruk "colony", briefly occupied during the Late Uruk period. It was eventually abandoned as a consequence of the collapse of Uruk society. In spite of this, a post-Uruk occupation is documented in the area north of the older settlement. Several workshops devoted to pottery production were unearthed there. Among the artefacts produced in said workshops, there are many clay statuettes representing nude women. They can be dated to the twenty-fifth century BC and reflect some features of Mesopotamian female clay statuettes from the fifth millennium BC. These statuettes are multiple images of a nude woman, whose body is rendered schematically and her breasts are marked by the application of clay pellets and only her face is modelled more accurately.

A nude feminine figurine was found at Mari together with other precious artefacts in the so-called "Treasure of Ur". The statuette is made of a copper alloy, with gold inlays, and is generally dated to the Protodynastic IIB. The horned headress on the head of this statuette supports the assumption that it represents a goddess.



schematic female figure
Anatolia, Alacahöyük
millennium BC

Medeniyetler Müzesi, Ankara

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Naked female figure

Northeast Syria, Tell Mozan

Late III millennium BC

Terracotta

Directorate-General of Antiquities and
Museums - DGAM, Syria



She is endowed with athletic shoulders and the wide hips contrast with the small breasts and the fine modelling that renders the other body parts. The big eyes are inlaid in mother-of-pearl and lapis lazuli, and her lips seem about to open into a smile. This statuette was found together with other precious objects including a lapis lazuli bead bearing the name of Mesanepada, king of Ur. In spite of this, it is not certain whether it was produced at Ur and thus a Syrian origin cannot be excluded.

A FEMININE IDOL FROM TELL MOZAN, THE OLDEST HURRIAN CENTRE

Lastly, we mention a statuette found at Tell Mozan-Urkesh. A Hurrian dynasty ruled the kingdom of Urkesh (Tell Mozan, Northeast Syria, fig. 6) in the second half of the third millennium BC, and a female statuette was found at Tell Mozan in a pit that cuts through the outer wall of the royal palace of Urkesh. The statuette is made of terracotta and dates back to the post Akkadian age (late third millennium BC). The lower part of the body and the base, as well, are not preserved.

The statuette represents a nude woman; the female traits of her body are strongly emphasized, such as her big buttocks and the large pubic triangle, which is framed

by three impressed lines. Two small applied pellets indicate her breasts. The represented woman wears a necklace and features an elaborate hairstyle. The face is plastically modelled and marked by a big nose, bulging cheeks and a small mouth. A deep slot on the top of the head might have held aromatic substance to be burned.

The finding of several high quality clay sculptures in the third millennium levels at Urkesh supports the assumption that they and also the aforementioned statuette might be the product of a local workshop. The particular shape of the face and the prominent cheeks are features that distinguish this artefact from the other contemporary Syrian clay statuettes, whereas they can be seen in some more recent clay sculptures dated during the Khabur-Ware period, such as a female clay head from Tell Mozan and some figurines discovered at Tell Arbid as well.

DeM.S.

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